

Picturing America Conference, July 7, 2011
Session 3: "Glory: Augustus Saint-Gaudens's Memorial to the Massachusetts 54th
Regiment and Colonel Robert Gould Shaw"
Presented by Dr. Nancy Scott

Dr. Scott will present on American monuments and memory. This presentation will focus on Augustus Saint-Gaudens' *Robert Gould Shaw and the 54th Regiment Memorial* from the Picturing America portfolio. She will detail the larger cultural history informing the monument, detailing the intellectual passion of New England abolitionists. Their fierce determination to fight slavery influenced not only the sacrifice of a young Boston colonel, Robert Gould Shaw and his men. The collective ardor of this singular generation ("I want this monument to be an educator" remarked one) encouraged the artist to commit his deepest efforts to creating an unusual monument.

The many poetic and other artistic responses to the monument will be briefly surveyed as examples of its powerful resonance. Most famous today is the movie *Glory* (1989) which dramatized the sacrifice of the first troop of African-American volunteers, The 54th Massachusetts Regiment, to serve in the Civil War. Shaw and hundreds of his men died at Fort Wagner, South Carolina in July 1863. The Shaw Memorial is estimated by many today to be the greatest work of public sculpture in America.

Poetry and music written in response to the Shaw memorial, and the sacrifice of the 54th Volunteer Regiment:

- Ralph Waldo Emerson, *Voluntaries* (1863)
So nigh is grandeur to our dust,
So near is God to man,
When Duty whispers low, Thou must,
The youth replies, I can."
- William Vaughn Moody, *Ode in a Time of Hesitation* (1900).
- John Berryman, *Boston Common* (1942)
- Robert Lowell's modernist imagery, *For the Union Dead* (1960).
- Memorial music of Charles Ives, *Three Songs in New England*, set to his own poetry (1911).
- The movie, *Glory*, about the men of the 54th Regiment. Director, Edward Zwick. Starring Denzel Washington, Morgan Freeman, and Matthew Broderick (1989).

Augustus Saint-Gaudens (1848-1907)

Key figures in the history of the Shaw Memorial, a monument that also serves as memorial of Colonel Robert Gould Shaw (1838-1863) and his soldiers at Fort Wagner South Carolina on July 18, 1863.

Architects H. H. Richardson (1838-1886); Charles McKim (1847-1909) (Lead architect of the firm McKim, Mead and White—the White of this triad was Stanford White, also famous for the original Penn Station in New York, and a frequent collaborator with Saint-Gaudens).

Patrons were notable New England abolitionists, among whom were Shaw family members or relatives:

Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803-1882) New England Transcendentalist, philosopher.

Frederick Douglass (1818-95) social reformer and orator; author of *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, An American Slave* (1845); served to recruit volunteers for the 54th Regiment, abolitionist and women's suffrage advocate.

Sen. Charles Sumner (1811-1874), Massachusetts Senator.

Famous for fiery oratory against slavery in the US Senate before the Civil War; beaten severely by a pro-slavery advocate Preston Brooks on the floor of the Senate in 1856, from which he took three years to recover. Original member of the Governor's commission to build a memorial to Robert Gould Shaw and his troops in Boston.

Alice Hooper (1841-79) first collector of *The Slave Ship* by JMW Turner in Boston.

Clover Hooper Adams (1842-1885) wife of Henry Adams, and first to record the Shaw Memorial in Saint-Gaudens's studio in 1883.

John Murray Forbes (1813 -1898) Related by marriage to Ralph Waldo Emerson, Harvard intellectual and railroad businessman and entrepreneur.

Key works of architecture and sculpture of the period.

H. H. Richardson. Trinity Church. Copley Square, Boston Completed 1877.

[Interior of the crossing of the church, with painted spandrel by Saint-Gaudens, St. Paul. 1877.]

Early monument commissions of Saint-Gaudens:

Monument to *Admiral David Farragut*. 1877-80. Unveiled in New York City, 1881. Madison Square Park.

The Puritan (Dean Samuel Chapin) 1883-86. Unveiled Thanksgiving Day, 1887, Stearns Square. Springfield, Mass.

Standing Lincoln. First cast in bronze 1877. Copies in Chicago, Washington DC and London.

Robert Gould Shaw and 54th Massachusetts Regiment Memorial. Contract signed in 1884. Unveiling and inauguration on Memorial Day, 1897 Boston Common, Boston Mass.

Saint-Gaudens early (overlooked) Roman period of study: Emphasis on antiquity during his residence from 1870-75. Saint-Gaudens as young man in Rome.

Head of Brutus - commissions from antique portraiture;

Bust of Demosthenes. 1873-74.

Equestrian monuments: Grandeur of horse and hero

1. Antique: Marcus Aurelius 160-180 CE; 19th Century:

2. George Washington by Henry Kirke Brown, 1851 in Union Square New York; 2a. George Washington by Thomas Ball (1869), in the Public Garden Boston.
3. Renaissance: Donatello, First freestanding bronze since antiquity, The Gattamelata, Padua (1455-65).

ASG: The American Michelangelo? Or he who 'spoke the language of the equestrian'? Gattamelata compared to Wm. Tecumseh Sherman Monument in New York City.

4. Realist bust of Sherman, modeled from life in 1888 compared to the seated Sherman astride his horse.
5. Second comparison – Donatello to Saint Gaudens' Sherman. (Quote from Henry Adams, "The Dynamo and the Virgin" in *The Education of Henry Adams* 1900)
6. General William Tecumseh Sherman Monument, Grand Army Plaza, New York City. Inaugurated 1904.
8. Hall of Sculpture, Metropolitan Museum. 1908.
Organized by Daniel Chester French, Committee on Acquisitions, sculptor of the *Concord Minuteman* (Concord Mass- Old North Bridge) and the *Lincoln Monument*.

The Triumphal March, and procession of soldiers:

1. Roman triumphal arch: 1st-2nd century CE.
2. Arch of Constantine, Rome LIBERATORIURBIS Trajanic Relief of the Siege of Verona the Arch of Trajan.

Multiple images and details of the Shaw memorial, with details of the soldiers.
Forty heads of African – Americans modeled from life for the soldiers.

Original Committee: Gov John Andrew, Gov. of Massachusetts in 1865, Joshua B. Smith, Rep Charles Sumner, Col Henry Lee, John Murray Forbes.

Supporters of the volunteer effort, and later of the commission for the monument:

1. Frederick Douglass, daguerreotype portrait of c 1845; portrait after 1865 with his son. [Two of Douglass's sons served with the 54th Regiment and survived.]
2. Joshua B. Smith, early employee of the Shaw family, later successful caterer in Boston. Josephine Shaw Lowell. Shaw's younger sister. Marble Portrait bas-relief. 1899.

Civil war themes in 19th century painting: an earlier work of the great British painter, J. M. W. Turner was a 'sermon in paint' that showed the dread 'triangular trade' and its macabre abuses of the enslaved. Catalyst for Civil War commemoration?

~~. **J. M. W. Turner** (British, 1775-1851) *The Slave Ship (Slavers throwing overboard the Dead and Dying- Typhoon Coming on)* 1840 R. A.
Purchased by Miss Alice Hooper in 1876 [* cousin of Robert Gould Shaw], and placed on loan at the MFA, Boston from 1877

~~. **Winslow Homer**

Prisoners from the Front 1866 (This painting was first purchased by John Taylor Johnston, first president of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, who also owned *The Slave Ship* until 1876).

Exhibited in 1866 at the National Academy of Design

Picturing America: Homer *Veteran in a New Field* 1865

Other commemorative sculpture of the period:

The Adams Monument

Rock Creek Park Cemetery, Washington D. C. 1886-87.

Shaw Memorial: Head of the allegory Peace

Compared to The Adams Monument, symbols of death and peace.

Is there a difference between monument and memorial: How does a collective memory of past history develop? How is history erased?

The Sherman Monument, Grand Army Plaza, New York City. Various views: Old photos of the inauguration day in 1904, the Paris Studio with Saint Gaudens and his assistants; and the plaster version as installed in the Universal Exhibition of Paris, 1900.

The *Sherman* with a focus on the figure of Victory. Designed from 1892-96; inaug. 1904

Bust Hettie Anderson 1897, the Head of Victory.

~Twenty Dollar Gold Coin-“Liberty” coin--Saint-Gaudens

Coinage project developed by President Theodore Roosevelt.

Last considerations – Siting the monument: Placement of the Saint-Gaudens Shaw Memorial and Sherman Monument (once destined for Central Park, NYC).

The Boston Statehouse, designed by Charles Bulfinch.

Terrace behind the monument (2 views), designed by Charles McKim, architect. The struggle over “The Sacredness of the Tree” -- Parks Commissioner vs. the artist.